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FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0635

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000057

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KIRF PINR LO

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP JANUARY 26, 2007

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 21

¶B. 06 BRATISLAVA 815

¶C. 06 BRATISLAVA 977

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

A LITTLE LIGHT DINNER CONVERSATION:

AMBASSADOR AND FM KUBIS TALK ABOUT PM FICO

¶1. (C) Over dinner with the Ambassador and their wives on January 23, Foreign Minister Jan Kubis acknowledged that Prime Minister Robert Fico will likely continue to infuriate international partners as he did, for example, with his attendance at the Cuban national day reception on January 11 and his proposed (and then canceled) plans to travel to Venezuela to meet with President Hugo Chavez. Kubis admitted that Fico has no interest in democracy promotion abroad. (COMMENT. Fico's lack of interest is precisely why we raise it with him and his advisors at every available opportunity. END COMMENT.)

¶2. (C) Kubis also expressed his frustration that the PM does not have a single, designated foreign policy advisor on his team with whom the FM could coordinate. However, when he gets face time with the PM, Kubis said, the PM is willing to listen to Kubis's advice. Kubis feels that his own lack of membership in any political party allows him greater freedom and gives him the ability to play a moderating role.

KDH TO TALK QUIETLY TO THE ARCHBISHOP

¶3. (C) Chairman of smallest parliamentary party KDH (Christian Democratic Movement) Pavol Hrusovsky told the Ambassador that political leaders, including Fico, could not directly attack statements made by Archbishop Sokol, who recently praised the leader of the fascist WWII-era Slovak state (ref A), because it would be interpreted as an attack on the Catholic Church. Hrusovsky promised to talk quietly with Sokol about his controversial comments. KDH has close ties the Catholic Church. Hrusovsky pointed out that Sokol will reach retirement age in October 2008 and will likely leave his position at that time.

RELIGIOUS REGISTRATION LAW - EVEN MORE STRICT ??

¶4. (SBU) Two MPs, one from Smer and one from HZDS (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia), will present a draft amendment to the law on registration of religious organizations to parliament during its next session, which opens on January ¶130. Rumor has it that the draft will propose changing the 20,000 signatures needed for registration (already the toughest standard in the region) from those of sympathizers (who could be non-believers) to those of members of the faith.

¶5. (SBU) After the success of the Mormon Church in registering as an official religion last October (ref B), the

Muslim community announced publicly and the Bahai community said privately that they intend to apply for registration.  
(COMMENT: We have consistently raised the importance of religious freedom with government officials across several ministries as well as with various church representatives. We will continue to make the point that such high registration requirements are inconsistent with international human rights standards. END COMMENT.)

#### ROMANI AFFAIRS - TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

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¶ 6. (U) An analysis of the December 2 local elections by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) showed that Romani candidates for city council and mayoral seats fared significantly better than four years prior. All of NDI's indicators pointed to increased Romani representation at the local level, with the exception of female Romani candidates. Some examples: number of municipalities with Romani representation went from 57 to 95; number of Romani mayors went from 11 to 19; number of Romani town councilors went from 158 to at least 220; number of cities where the Romani minority is under 40 percent which elected Romani city councilors went from 13 to 20.

¶ 7. (SBU) On December 13, the Slovak Constitutional Court ruled that the Kosice regional prosecutor's office had improperly closed the investigation of the claim by three Romani women of forced sterilization. As a remedy for a procedural violation of rights due to inadequate investigation at the appellate level, -- with no implication whether or not forced sterilization had taken place -- the Constitutional Court awarded the claimants SKK 50,000 (USD 1850) each. The Court instructed the prosecutor's office to

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re-open the case.

¶ 8. (SBU) Deputy Prime Dusan Minister Caplovic announced the recall of Klara Orgovanova, the Plenipotentiary of Romani Affairs, explaining that her vision of aiding Romani communities differs from that of the current government. He said that her approach helped only some communities whereas the government intends to address the problems of the entire minority. Observers note that Orgovanova has been at odds with Roma whom the current government relies on as external advisors. (COMMENT. This recall was not surprising in light of the fact the DPM's office, while promoting its own approach to Romani issues, has sidelined the Plenipotentiary's work since the change in administration last July. The Romani community has never been united and it appears that divisions continue despite gradually increasing representation of Roma in national-level government offices. END COMMENT.)

#### PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL PARTY TO MERGE WITH NATIONALISTS

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¶ 9. (SBU) Jan Slota of the SNS (Slovak National Party) claimed that his party will merge with HZD (Movement for Democracy), the political party which President Ivan Gasparovic founded in 2002 after splitting with HZDS, by the end of 2007. HZD did not receive enough votes in the June national elections to enter parliament, whereas SNS is a governing coalition partner. HZD would only acknowledge that it is in merger discussions and that further negotiations are necessary. The merger of the two parties would not represent a significant shift in policy for either. Such a merger would aid Gasparovic's presidential re-election chances in 2009. The long-range goal of such political maneuvering on Slota's side would be, presumably, to force Smer to choose between the rival presidential candidates of its two coalition partners. Slota may think that Smer would lean towards Gasparovic as a presidential candidate over Vladimir Meciar, thus giving a boost to Slota and SNS at the expense of HZDS.

VALLEE